1. (Currently amended) An apparatus for identifying characteristics of tissue, comprising:

a radiation source configured to perform an axial scan of the tissue using radiation; and

an imaging system adapted to receive axial scan radiation based on the axial scan, and to process data relating to the axial scan radiation to identify characteristics of the tissue,

wherein the imaging system includes an interferometer adapted to direct a portion of the radiation emitted by the radiation source into a sample arm and detecting radiation reflected from the tissue back through the sample arm, ~~and~~

wherein the imaging system identifies characteristics of the tissue by processing the axial scan radiation to provide the characteristics of the tissue, the axial scan radiation including radiation received from ~~the~~ a reference arm and radiation received from the sample arm, and comparing the characteristics of the tissue with a database of normalized characteristics of a plurality of tissue types, and

wherein at least one of (i) the radiation source is a swept wavelength optical source or (ii) the radiation source is a broad bandwidth light source and the imaging system includes a spectrometer.

2. (Original) The apparatus of claim 1, wherein the radiation source is a light source configured to emit light.

Claims 3 and 4 (Cancelled).

5. (Original) The apparatus of claim 2, wherein the light source delivers radiation to the tissue via an optical fiber disposed in an insertion device having a distal end at least

partially disposed within the insertion device and a proximal end.

6. (Original) The apparatus of claim 5, wherein the insertion device is configured to provide the distal end of the optical fiber adjacent to the tissue.

7. (Original) The apparatus of claim 5, wherein the insertion device is one of a barrel, a needle, and a stylet.

Claim 8 (Cancelled).

9. (Currently amended) The apparatus of claim 1, wherein the interferometer directs another portion of the radiation into the ~~a~~ reference arm.

Claim 10 (Cancelled)

11. (Currently amended) The apparatus of claim 1, wherein the sample changes ~~the axial scan radiation includes~~ at least one of the following properties of the axial scan radiation: backscattering, spectral properties, birefringence or ~~and~~ Doppler shift.

12. (Currently amended) The apparatus of claim 1, wherein the imaging system processes the axial scan radiation by performing at least one of standard deviation, average deviation, ~~and~~ or slope of the axial reflectivity profile relating to the axial scan radiation.

13. (Previously presented) The apparatus of claim 1, wherein the imaging system inputs data derived from the axial scan radiation into a statistical model to predict tissue type.

14. (Original) The apparatus of claim 13, wherein the statistical model extracts features from data derived from the axial scan radiation.

15. (Original) The apparatus of claim 13, wherein the statistical model is at least one of partial least squares or principle component analysis.

16. (Original) The apparatus of claim 1, wherein the imaging system identifies the characteristics of the tissue by determining reflectance characteristics of the axial scan radiation using interferometric ranging, and comparing the characteristics of the tissue with normalized reflectance characteristics of a plurality of types of tissue stored in a database.

17. (Original) The apparatus of claim 16, wherein the type of interferometric ranging is at least one of optical time domain reflectometry, spectral domain reflectometry and optical frequency domain reflectometry.

18. (Previously presented) A method for identifying characteristics of tissue, comprising ~~the steps~~:

performing an axial scan of the tissue using radiation; and

processing data relating to the axial scan radiation based on the axial scan to identify characteristics of the tissue using an imaging system, wherein a portion of the radiation emitted by the radiation source is directed into a sample arm and radiation reflected from the tissue back is obtained through the sample arm, wherein the processing step includes:

a) identifying characteristics of the tissue by processing the axial scan radiation to provide the characteristics of the tissue, the axial scan radiation including radiation received from ~~the~~ a reference arm and radiation received from the sample arm, and

b) comparing the characteristics of the tissue with a database of normalized

characteristics of a plurality of tissue types,

wherein at least one of (i) the radiation source is a swept wavelength optical source or (ii) the radiation source is a broad bandwidth light source and the imaging system includes a spectrometer.

19. (Currently amended) The method of claim 18, wherein the sample changes ~~the axial scan radiation includes~~ at least one of the following properties of the axial scan radiation: backscattering, spectral properties, birefringence or ~~and~~ Doppler shift.

20. (Currently amended) The method of claim 18, wherein the processing procedure ~~step~~ identifies the characteristics of the tissue by performing at least one of standard deviation of data associated with the axial scan radiation, average deviation of data associated with the axial scan radiation, and slope of the axial reflectivity profile of data associated with the axial scan radiation.

21. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 18, wherein the radiation source includes a light source delivers the radiation to perform the axial scan of the tissue via an optical fiber disposed in an insertion device having a distal end at least partially disposed within the insertion device and a proximal end.

22. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 18, wherein the processing ~~step~~ procedure identifies the characteristics of the tissue by inputting data derived from the axial scan radiation into a statistical model to predict a tissue type.

23. (Previously presented) The method of claim 18, wherein the processing step identifies the characteristics of the tissue by determining reflectance characteristics of the axial scan

radiation using interferometric ranging and comparing the characteristics of the tissue with a database of stored normalized reflectance characteristics of a plurality of types of tissue.

24. (Currently amended) A computer-accessible storage medium storing a software program for identifying characteristics of tissue, wherein the software program, when executed by a processing arrangement, is configured to cause the processing arrangement to execute the procedures ~~steps~~ comprising of:

causing a performance of ~~performing~~ an axial scan of the tissue using radiation using a radiation source; and

processing data relating to the axial scan radiation to identify characteristics of the tissue, wherein a portion of the radiation emitted by the radiation source is directed into a sample arm and radiation reflected from the tissue back is obtained through the sample arm, wherein the processing step includes:

a) identifying characteristics of the tissue by processing the axial scan radiation to provide the characteristics of the tissue, the axial scan radiation including radiation received from ~~the~~ a reference arm and radiation received from the sample arm, and

b) comparing the characteristics of the tissue with a database of normalized characteristics of a plurality of tissue types,

wherein at least one of (i) the radiation source is a swept wavelength optical source or (ii) the radiation source is a broad bandwidth light source and the processing arrangement is part of an imaging system which includes a spectrometer.

25. (Currently amended) The storage medium of claim 24, wherein the sample changes ~~the axial scan radiation includes~~ at least one of the following properties of the axial scan radiation: backscattering, spectral properties, birefringence or ~~and~~ Doppler shift.

26. (Original) The storage medium of claim 24, wherein the processing step identifies the characteristics of the tissue by performing at least one of standard deviation of data associated with the axial scan radiation, average deviation of data associated with the axial scan radiation, and slope of the axial reflectivity profile of data associated with the axial scan radiation.

27. (Original) The storage medium of claim 24, wherein a light source delivers the radiation to perform the axial scan of the tissue via an optical fiber disposed in an insertion device having a distal end at least partially disposed within the insertion device and a proximal end.

28. (Original) The storage medium of claim 24, wherein the processing step identifies the characteristics of the tissue by inputting data derived from the axial scan radiation into a statistical model to predict tissue type.

29. (Previously presented) The storage medium of claim 24, wherein the processing step identifies the characteristics of the tissue by determining reflectance characteristics of the axial scan radiation using interferometric ranging and comparing the characteristics of the tissue with a database of stored normalized reflectance characteristics of a plurality of types of tissue.

30. (Currently amended) A software ~~logic~~ arrangement for identifying characteristics of

tissue, which, when executed by a processing arrangement, ~~is operable~~ configures the processing arrangement to perform procedures ~~the steps~~ comprising ~~of~~:

causing a performance of ~~performing~~ an axial scan of the tissue using radiation using a radiation source; and

processing data relating to the axial scan radiation to identify characteristics of the tissue, wherein a portion of the radiation emitted by the radiation source is directed into a sample arm and radiation reflected from the tissue back is obtained through the sample arm, wherein the processing step includes:

a) identifying characteristics of the tissue by processing the axial scan radiation to provide the characteristics of the tissue, the axial scan radiation including radiation received from ~~the~~ a reference arm and radiation received from the sample arm, and

b) comparing the characteristics of the tissue with a database of normalized characteristics of a plurality of tissue types,

wherein at least one of (i) the radiation source is a swept wavelength optical source or (ii) the radiation source is a broad bandwidth light source and the processing arrangement is part of an imaging system which includes a spectrometer.

31. (Currently amended) The software ~~logic~~ arrangement of claim 30, wherein the sample changes ~~the axial scan radiation includes~~ at least one of the following properties of the axial scan radiation: backscattering, spectral properties, birefringence or ~~and~~ Doppler shift.

Claim 32 (Cancelled)

33. (Currently amended) The software ~~logic~~ arrangement of claim 30, wherein the radiation source includes a light source that delivers the radiation to perform the axial scan of the tissue via an optical fiber disposed in an insertion device having a distal end at least partially disposed within the insertion device and a proximal end.

34. (Currently amended) The software ~~logic~~ arrangement of claim 30, wherein the processing procedure ~~step~~ identifies the characteristics of the tissue by inputting data derived from the axial scan radiation into a statistical model to predict tissue type.

35. (Currently amended) The software ~~logic~~ arrangement of claim 30, wherein the processing procedure ~~step~~ identifies the characteristics of the tissue by determining reflectance characteristics of the axial scan radiation using interferometric ranging and comparing the characteristics of the tissue with a database of stored normalized reflectance characteristics of a plurality of types of tissue.

36. (Currently Amended) An apparatus for identifying characteristics of tissue, comprising:

a radiation source configured to deliver radiation to the tissue; and

an imaging system configured ~~adapted~~ to receive the radiation and process unidimensional data relating to the radiation to identify characteristics of the tissue.

Claims 37-39 (Cancelled).

40. (Previously presented) The apparatus of claim 36, wherein the data is based on at least one of a spectral domain low-coherence interferometry and an optical frequency domain reflectrometry.

41. (Previously presented) An apparatus for identifying characteristics of tissue, comprising:

a radiation source configured to perform an axial scan of the tissue using radiation; and

an imaging system adapted to receive axial scan radiation based on the axial scan, receive data relating to the axial scan radiation that is based on at least one of a spectral domain low-coherence interferometry or an optical frequency domain reflectrometry, and process the data to automatically identify characteristics of the tissue.

42. (Previously presented) An apparatus for identifying characteristics of tissue, comprising:

a radiation source configured to perform an axial scan of the tissue using radiation; and

an imaging system adapted to receive axial scan radiation based on the axial scan, and to process data relating to the axial scan radiation to identify characteristics of the tissue, wherein the imaging system processes the axial scan radiation by performing at least one of standard deviation, average deviation, and slope of the axial reflectivity profile relating to the axial scan radiation.

43. (Previously presented) An apparatus for identifying characteristics of tissue, comprising:

a radiation source configured to deliver radiation to the tissue; and

an imaging system adapted to receive the radiation and process unidimensional data relating to the radiation that is based on at least one of a spectral domain low-coherence interferometry or an optical frequency domain reflectrometry to identify characteristics of the tissue.

44. (New) An apparatus for identifying characteristics of tissue, comprising:

a radiation source configured to perform an axial scan of the tissue using radiation and deliver radiation to the tissue via an optical fiber disposed in an insertion device; and

an imaging system adapted to receive axial scan radiation based on the axial scan, and to process data relating to the axial scan radiation to identify characteristics of the tissue,

wherein the imaging system includes an interferometer adapted to direct a portion of the radiation emitted by the radiation source into a sample arm and detecting radiation reflected from the tissue back through the sample arm, and

wherein the imaging system identifies characteristics of the tissue by processing the axial scan radiation to provide the characteristics of the tissue, the axial scan radiation including radiation received from a reference arm and radiation received from the sample arm, and comparing the characteristics of the tissue with a database of normalized characteristics of a plurality of tissue types.